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INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9476  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6376  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001620

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/03/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: NORWAY'S ENVOY "MODERATELY OPTIMISTIC" ABOUT  
MEDIATION PROSPECTS

REF: BLAKE/BOUCHER E-MAIL 09/02/06 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)  
)

11. SUMMARY: (C) Norwegian mediator Hanssen-Bauer briefed Co-Chair Ambassadors on October 2 on his meetings with Sri Lankan government officials. He said that the GSL had denied media reports of preconditions for possible talks with the LTTE. The GSL would prefer November 10 or October 28 for talks, and was interested in Switzerland as a possible venue.

Hanssen-Bauer was concerned about making travel arrangements for the LTTE delegation and asked the Co-Chairs for suggestions on how to avoid transiting Colombo. The Co-Chairs agreed that there was a substantial risk of actions by either side that could inflame or derail the process, and that an early date for resumption of talks was desirable. In a separate meeting, Ambassador told Defense Secretary Rajapaksa that a resumption of offensive operations by Sri Lankan forces would likely result in the U.S. canceling the joint military exercise planned for October. End summary.

12. (C) Norwegian Special Envoy Jon Hanssen-Bauer told the Co-Chair Ambassadors that the GSL had given him a proposal for talks without preconditions to present to the LTTE leadership in Kilinochchi. His government interlocutors told him to "ignore" a story in the Sunday Times of Colombo setting out three conditions for talks. The GSL assured him that (reports to the contrary) it had no pre-conditions. Hanssen-Bauer said that he was "moderately optimistic" that his mediation would be able to bring the two sides together for another round of talks soon. In his view, a brief window of opportunity was opening. He observed that the GSL was responding in a positive way to the statement issued by the September 11-12 Co-Chairs meeting in Brussels. This showed that pressure from the international community to return to the negotiating table was working.

13. (C) Hanssen-Bauer said he was telling both sides not to

think in terms of a one-off event. Rather, he was seeking to lower expectations, get the process back on track, and look for opportunities for confidence-building measures. Hanssen Bauer said he did not see any possibility of meeting with Tiger supremo Prabhakaran at this stage: "Maybe later, when things calm down." However, he was sure that Prabhakaran would not permit LTTE negotiator Tamilselvan participate in any talks without his blessing.

¶4. (C) The Norwegians had suggested October 18-25 for talks.

However, the GSL said they would prefer November 10 (when budget debates in Parliament will largely be over), or October 28. The Norwegians will push for the earlier date. All the Co-Chair Ambassadors concurred, concerned that in the current fluid situation, much could occur before the end of October - during which time any number of things could occur to derail talks. Regarding the venue, the GSL had indicated that sensitivities about the last, abortive meeting would rule out Oslo this time. Switzerland may be an attractive option for both sides. Hanssen-Bauer told the Co-Chair Ambassadors that while he had discussed with A/S Boucher the possibility of a high-level meeting in Washington on October 27, that date will have to change given the new proposed dates from the GSL

¶5. (C) Hanssen-Bauer said he was particularly concerned about travel arrangements for the LTTE delegation. Based on the humiliating treatment they received last time on their return via Colombo airport, they had said categorically they would not use that route again. Hanssen Bauer said that clear, transparent, logical guarantees were needed that the LTTE could proceed unhindered. He asked the group to get

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back to him with suggestions for logistics.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The Co-Chairs are all concerned that the GSL may follow the advice of many hardliners in the military (and among Sinhalese chauvinists) to press their military advantage and try to wipe out the LTTE now. Ambassador suggested that if both sides agree to talks, we will need to press at our level and from capitals for military restraint. He noted that A/S Boucher Richard was considering traveling to Sri Lanka October 19-20; other Co-Chairs might consider sending high level officials in staggered intervals during October to maintain support for negotiations. The other Co-Chairs agreed.

¶7. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: In a separate meeting with the Foreign Secretary and Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa, Ambassador stressed that the U.S. priority was to support the peace process. The USG, he reiterated, believes that a purely military solution to the conflict is unrealistic. The GSL officials agreed that the recent military advances by Sri Lankan forces had created an opportunity for talks. Action should now move to the diplomatic track: "The time is ripe for talks." Ambassador pointed out that the Sri Lankan media and public might misinterpret the planned bilateral military exercise in October as an indication of U.S. support for a broadened Sri Lankan military offensive against the Tigers. The USG was working on media guidance to counter this. He emphasized that the U.S. supported Sri Lanka's right to defend itself against terrorist acts. However, renewed offensive operations by the Sri Lankan forces would mean that we would have to cancel the exercise. Both men nodded.

BLAKE